



## COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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### Memorandum

**To:** Sonya Davis  
RFAB Coordinator

**From:** Lewis S. Gillingham

**Date:** October 29, 2007

**Subject:** Project Number 0607-09

The Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament held its annual committee meeting last week, October 22, 2007, in Virginia Beach at Marina Shores. The most important and contentious item on the agenda was the Tournament's policy of rewarding release Citations to anglers for fish that are caught during a closed season. This policy allows the awarding of release Citations for eligible species of fish caught during a closed season so long as catch-and-release fishing is legal. Of special focus by the Committee was the development of a directed trophy striped bass fishery, along the lower Eastern Shore side of the Chesapeake Bay, in January 2007 (the Chesapeake Bay season closes December 31), its use of live eel for bait and the associated hooking mortality.

The Committee had significant concerns regarding the potential impact to the striped bass stock from this directed catch-and-release fishery. A review of the scientific data specific to hooking mortality of striped bass suggests mortality rates should be lowest under the conditions encountered in January on the lower Chesapeake Bay, namely, cool water temperatures and high salinities. However, these hooking mortality studies were conducted on school-sized striped bass from less than 18 inches to 24 inches but most of the fish encountered by Virginia anglers in this winter fishery range from 20 to over 50 pounds. Additionally, long-term mortality, deaths that occur days after the initial capture and release, are poorly understood.

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After considerable debate, the Committee re-affirmed its policy adopted in 2001. The Tournament will continue the rewarding of release Citations during a closed season as long as catch-and-release is legal but stipulated any additional hooking mortality associated with this practice should not jeopardize the health of the stock.

The Committee next discussed RFAB project number 0607-09, a pilot study to assess the post release survival of large striped bass, caught on live eels rigged with either J-hooks or circle hooks in the Virginia winter recreational fishery at the mouth of Chesapeake Bay, through the use of archival satellite tags. The RFAB is scheduled to make its final evaluations and vote whether to recommend funding of this project at their November 5, 2007 meeting. The VSWFT Committee felt this project would be extremely useful to assess hooking mortality in one of Virginia's premier fisheries. Further, the Committee was enthusiastic the research was scheduled to begin this winter and data would be available for evaluation in a short period of time. The VSWFT Committee voted unanimously to recommend this project receive support by the RFAB.

If you have any additional questions regarding this issue, I will attend your meeting November 5, 2007.

VSWFT Committee members present:

B.W. Beauchamp  
Dave Elliott  
Bill Hall, Jr.  
Craig Paige  
Jon Lucy  
Ken Neill III  
William Seymour  
Christine Snook  
Jerry Thrash